



MINUTES

GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM Second Quarterly Council Meeting April 24, 2008 - 12:30 PM

Call To Order

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order.

Present at the meeting were:

Council Members: Steve Stancil, Chairman, Noel Holcomb, John Bembry, Stacy Patton, Brent Dykes, Paul Michael and Robert Farris.

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from the January 17, 2008 GLCP meeting for approval. Robert Farris made a motion seconded by Stacy Patton to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Association of County Commissioners

Curt Soper introduced Robert Barr with the Association of County Commissioners. Robert stated that ACCG held two meetings, one in 2006 and one in 2007, with select participants from state agencies, counties and conservation groups to discuss the need for a stable funding source for land conservation efforts in Georgia. ACCG has created a new land conservation coordinator position to assist with county efforts and projects, and they are currently working with about a dozen counties to pull resources together.

Marketing Efforts

Curt Soper introduced Rusty Paul to give the marketing quarterly update. Rusty Paul stated that several articles have been published, articles supporting the check off box for individual income taxes, direct mail campaign went out to the largest land owners, and a new marketing exhibit display has been produced and was available for viewing.

2008 Legislative Session

Curt Soper stated that two pieces of land conservation related legislation were passed. One was to amend the Land Conservation Act to make loans available to non profits with support of local governments and added the Forestry Commission and the State Soil, Water and Conservation Commission and other state entities as grant recipients able to apply for projects. The second piece of legislation amends the conservation tax credit incentive for Georgians. The amendments will now allow a bargain sale to qualify and will more closely follow the federal IRS policies. The GLCP appropriation for FY09 is \$10 million.

Land Conservation Project Reviews

Curt Soper stated that the Council currently has approved 45 projects totaling 61,731 acres since its inception; total state investment is \$58 million; total project value/cost is \$200+ million; 32 grants and 6 loans have been provided to DNR, cities, and counties; 14 conservation easements and 33 fee title acquisitions have been approved; and there have been 9 outright gifts of property to the state.

Curt Soper presented the following projects:

Dougherty County

Dougherty County is requesting a grant in the amount of \$721,805. The project would protect two tracts totaling 397 acres and 1.5 miles of riverfront located within a 7-mile Greenspace corridor along the Flint river near Albany. One property was formerly a primitive camping area owned by the Boy Scouts and the other was formally the Radium springs golf course. This stretch of river has recently been designated as critical habitat for four federally listed mussel species: Purple Bankclimber, Shinyrayed Pocketbook, Gulf Moccasinshell and Oval Pigtoe. Adjacent Radium Springs, owned by DNR, is the largest natural spring in Georgia and provides important cold-water refugia for diadromous fish such as the Striped Bass, and habitat for rare cave-dwelling species such as the Georgia Blind Salamander. The Flint River is a high priority waterway as defined by DNR and lies within a high priority watershed. MAI appraisals have been completed on the two tracts of property and the combined appraised value is \$1.4 million (\$3,556/acre). Noel Holcomb made a motion seconded by Paul Michael to approve a grant in the amount of \$721,805 to Dougherty County. The motion passed unanimously.

Sandy Springs

The city of Sandy Springs is requesting a grant in the amount of \$250,000. This project would protect an undeveloped 24 acre preserve in the city of Sandy Springs. The property is owned by 85-year old Margaret Miles who has lived on this tract her entire life and desires to see it protected in perpetuity. This property was acquired by her father over 100 years ago and contains a single modest home. The property consists of mature loblolly pine mixed hardwood forest uplands and contains a small creek that feeds into the nearby Chattahoochee River. The creek is in excellent condition considering the amount of surrounding development and water clarity is good, with little evidence of erosion. There is no evidence of prior timber harvest, and a large number of the trees appear to be >100 years old. Despite a number of exotics present in the understory the site has high conservation value for its water quality, migratory bird habitat, and the potential for passive public recreation. Ms. Miles would retain a life estate and continue to live on the property for the rest of her life. The city would use the property as a passive educational and recreational park consistent with the explicit wishes of Ms. Miles. An MAI appraisal has been completed on the property with values of \$4.4 million (183k/acre) for the unencumbered property and \$2.6 million (108k/acre) for the property encumbered with a retained life estate. Paul Michael made a motion seconded by Stacy Patton to approve a grant in the amount of \$250,000. One Council member opposed. The motion passed by majority vote.

Athens-Clarke County

Athens-Clarke County is requesting a grant in the amount of \$175,000. This project would protect a 7.2 acre site along the Middle Oconee River located within a very developed area,

just west of downtown Athens and adjacent to the Atlanta Highway (U.S. 78). This tract is part of the largest remaining block of greenspace remaining with the Athens I-10 loop and this block of property is a high for the Athens-Clarke County greenspace program. The majority of the property (5 acres) is within the River floodplain and consists of grassy floodplain habitat. The remainder of the property (2.2 acres) is upland with a fairly mature mixed oak-hickory forest habitat. Much of the floodplain area has been fenced off and the river bank is very steep. The County intends to use the property as a trail head and to provide connectivity and fulfill part of their overall Middle Oconee River greenway plan. An MAI appraisal has been completed on the property with an estimated value of \$311,000. Council members discussed the value of the property, and suggested that more local funds needed to be invested and that better connectivity of the project was needed. A motion was made by Noel Holcomb and seconded by Robert Farris to table this project. The motion passed unanimously.

Grady County

Grady County is requesting a grant in the amount of \$342,750. This project would protect a 149-acre tract that is remarkable for its spring wildflower display. This property has significant botanical value, having one of the largest and most dense populations of trout lilies known from the state. This species is more commonly found in the northern parts of the state. Along with trout lilies, the property contains other plants of special concern such as Green-Fly Orchid, Buckthorn, Southern Twayblade, Florida Bellwort, and Spring Coralroot. The property consists mostly of 40-50 year old mixed hardwoods with some scattered Spruce Pine, and contains good quality Beech-Magnolia slope forest – a high priority habitat identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan. One half mile of Wolf Creek runs through the property and has a high quality intact floodplain with several seeps and few invasive species. The property would be managed through a partnership including the Tall Timbers Research Station, the Birdsong Nature Center, Grady County, and the Florida Native Plant Society with an emphasis on limiting disturbance to sensitive areas and providing high quality environmental education programs. An MAI appraisal has been completed on the property with an estimated value of \$665,000 (\$4,750/acre). John Bemby made a motion seconded by Stacy Patton to approve a grant in the amount of \$342,750 to Grady County. The motion passed unanimously.

Greene County

Green County is requesting a grant in the amount of \$1,868,003. This project would protect a 612-acre property adjacent to other protected lands owned by the U.S. Forest Service and the University of Georgia. Protection of this tract would help create a 16,000 acre block of contiguous public/protected land. The property is forested and contains steep slopes and drainages. Most of the site (400+ acres) has been logged and replanted into loblolly pine plantation which is 9-11 years old. The steeper slopes and creek buffers (200 acres) support 50-60 year old mixed hardwood forest. There are 4 creek tributaries that run through the property into the Oconee River. The two creeks in the northern portion of the property appear to have good water quality and large forested buffers while the two creeks running through the southern portion of the property have smaller buffers and show signs of erosion and sedimentation. Should they acquire the property, the University would manage it as part of their Watson Springs Experimental Forest. An MAI appraisal has been completed on the property with an estimated value of \$3.99 million (\$6,520/acre). Discussion centered on the fact that the property has been timbered recently, was acquired by the current owners less than a year ago at a substantially lower value than the appraisal, that the appraisal was done several months ago and may be a bit old, and that more details on how the property would be

managed in the future if protected has been requested but had not been received. A motion by Brent Dykes and seconded by Paul Michael to table this project. The motion passed unanimously.

Harris County – Revised Project

Harris County is requesting a grant for \$2,000,000 million and a loan for \$2,000,000. This project was presented to the Council in 2006; staff has been working with the client and is now ready to be presented back to the Council for consideration. This project would protect 2,230 acres along the ridge and slopes of Pine Mountain through the purchase of a conservation easement (2,131 acres) to be held by GFC and the purchase of additional property (15) acres) by Harris County. This property is adjacent to both a 2,507 acre tract with an easement on it held by GFC and to FDR State Park owned by DNR. The property contains examples of the very rare montane longleaf ecosystem. Public access and use and recreational values are provided for by the County's acquisition and management of 150 acres of property that is a part of this project. An MAI appraisal has been completed for the 2,080 acre easement property with values set at \$12.8 million (\$6,062/acre) for the unencumbered property and \$7 million (\$3,325/acre) as the easement value. The easement would allow future construction of a nature center and modest cabins on 20 acres and continued forest management geared towards native forest restoration. Noel Holcomb made a motion seconded by John Bembry to approve a \$2,000,000 grant and a \$2,000,000 loan to Harris County subject to approval of language to be added to the conservation easement specifying the size, use, location, and other restrictions on the nature center and cabins. The motion passed unanimously.

Decatur County

Decatur County is requesting a loan in the amount of \$3,000,000. This is Phase 2 of the Silver Lake project which is protecting 8,430 acres of largely native longleaf pine/wiregrass forest and wetlands located along Lake Seminole and the Flint River in SW Georgia. This is a rare property with a rich history. The prior owners (International Paper) wished to see the property protected by the state and worked exclusively with the Conservation Fund on the sale of the property. Much of the property is in pristine ecological wildlife as well as rare, threatened, and/or endangered aquatic and terrestrial species that are federally protected and/or state protected. There are approximately 19 active groups of red cockaded woodpeckers found on the property, and this acquisition is the first state owned property with these rare birds present. The property was purchased by the Conservation fund with the intent to sell to the state in three phases. The state acquired about \$20 million of the property in Phase I in December 2007. TCF has taken out a loan from IP for the balance but must pay that loan off by June 2008. This phase 2 of the project will have the state acquire another \$15 million of the property. Match sources for Phase 2 include Decatur County (\$3 million), federally Endangered Species and Wildlife grants (\$3.5 million), and private foundations and organizations (\$8.9 million). Two appraisals have previously been completed with values set at \$40 million and \$45 million. Stacy Patton made a motion seconded by Robert Farris to approve a \$3,000,000 loan to Decatur County.

Scheduling Date for Strategic Planning Retreat

Chairman Stancil stated that it was time for the Council to schedule a Strategic Planning session and that we were looking at July 10, 2008 for the date. Curt Soper stated that it has been two years since the last Strategic Planning session and the Council needed to plan for the next two years. Stacy Patton made a motion seconded by Brent Dykes to schedule the

Strategic Planning session for July 10, 2008. Staff will notify Council members of the location.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Paul Michael to adjourn the meeting seconded by Brent Dykes. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m.

Kim Yawn, Executive Assistant

Chris Clark, Executive Director